

Disability Access Advisory Committee Fiscal Year 2002

The Disability Access Advisory Committee, charged with providing advice to the Town on issues involving access to Town facilities and programs, and with enabling persons with disabilities to participate fully in the life of the Town of Amherst, was reactivated in 2001. The Committee has met with the Town Manager, the Executive Director of the Council on Aging, and members of the Public Works and Planning departments to discuss problem areas and comment on projects being developed.

Committee members include Neil Davidson, Dana Goddard, Becky Hurwitz, Myra Ross, Jean Smyser, Jana Sorge, and Debra Waldron. After the departure of Human Rights Director Shenandoah Titus, Maura Plante became the Town staff liaison to the committee; Jean Smyser is DAAC's liaison to the Parking Commission.

The Committee has advised on problems with crosswalks, sidewalk curb ramps, walking trails, and snow removal near handicapped parking spaces. Suggestions were made on Town projects being planned, including the redesigned downtown sidewalks and the changes to Sweetser Park and Lessey Street.

Amherst entered the Accessible America 2001 Award Competition, sponsored by the National Organization on Disability. Although the Town did not win the \$25,000 prize grant, the effort enabled Committee members to appreciate the impressive variety of Amherst's provisions to ensure that citizens with disabilities can participate fully in the civic, social, recreational and cultural life of the Town.

Several DAAC members attended a regional meeting in West Springfield for western Massachusetts Disability Access committees, presented by the Massachusetts Office on Disability. We heard about current legislative bills and disability activities on the state level and discussed local problem areas with our counterparts in towns from Longmeadow to Ware and Greenfield.

In the spring, the planned addition to the Monkey Bar was described to the Committee by its architect. Since an extremely long ramp would not be feasible, Committee members expressed serious concerns about safe emergency exit for persons unable to use the outside stairs.

The Disability Access Advisory Committee will continue to work with Town departments to explore ways to provide better access to any new building additions and other projects or programs planned for Amherst in the future.

Submitted by Jean Smyser